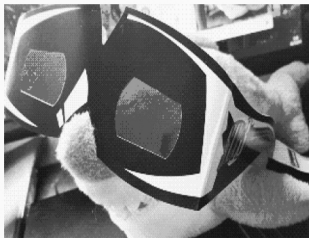


ISSUE ONE

A Trip to a Namco Museum
Eyes on Quality Assurance
Video Gaming in Poland
... and more!

THE
SCANLINES



Hello and welcome to this First issue of Between the Scanlines!

Phew, it's been a wild rush getting this first issue done! And as I type this 'Editor's Foreword', I'd like to first say how much I appreciate the reaction to the test 'Issue Zero' I put together in the space of a couple of hours just over a week ago.

It was super motivating and while this first issue of SCANLINES isn't quite as rough-and-ready as that proof of concept was, I still hope it feels like a fitting tribute to those fanzines of yesteryear that inspired its creation and feels just as much a passion project. My partner, whose nickname is Kit and some of you reading will know from Twitter/X, has also been a cheerleader as co-editor and contributor. So, thanks hun, for your support and enthusiasm for this project, too!

So yeah! In some ways, SCANLINES is a spinoff of what I've done for several years now on social media, gushing about various bits and pieces that I find interesting and sharing my passion for retro tech and retro media - and enjoying the passions of other people. But it's here in your digital hand, between these digital pages in booklet form, and who knows, perhaps in physical form too one day.

Enjoy, y'all, and feedback and comments are very welcome. You can reach me via @SharkaBytes on Twitter/X, Mastodon, and Bluesky, or you can drop me a line at curicuri creations@protonmail.com.

Sasha McAuliffe, Editor.

Contents, Attributions, and Special Thanks

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Front cover image taken from 'Warriors of Manga 7' Amiga PD slideshow disk.
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BITS 'N' BYTES - SAINT DRAGON (AMIGA)



Saint Dragon! Jaleco's shmup with a chrome-plated draconic hero first roared onto the arcade battlefield in 1989. Then it sprouted hydra-like heads to home in on home conversions - mainly on the 8 and 16-bit computers of the day. Only a single console received a conversion of Saint Dragon, the PC Engine. The version I'll be looking at in Bits 'n' Bytes will be the Commodore Amiga version.

As the titular cyborg creature, you'll be tasked with defeating the biomechanical horrors that comprise the Monster Cyborg Army - your former masters! One thing you'll notice right away with Amiga Saint Dragon is how accomplished it is on a technical level. You get sound FX and music! This really wasn't all that common for earlier Amiga games; usually you got one or the other.

Get your best joystick to hand as there's a lot of circular movement to be made. Saint Dragon's chrome body has a segmented design that rotates smoothly as you move up, down, and around. And you can use any part of it to shield your vulnerable head from enemy projectiles - a vital tactic as the action picks up and becomes frantic!

Power ups are plentiful and satisfying - you'll soon be spraying out plasma death in all directions!

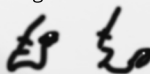
There's a lot to like about Saint Dragon on Amiga. There is some slowdown when it gets busy, but otherwise it's smooth scrolling all the way - unlike some other coin-ops on Amiga (cough cough UN Squadron).



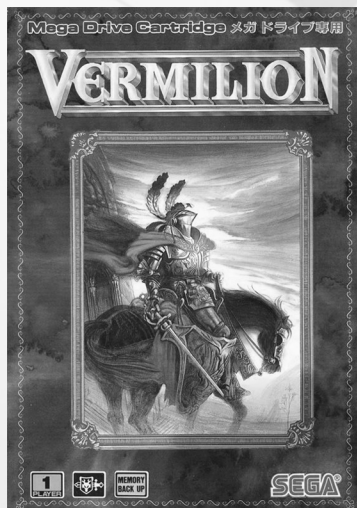
BATTLE OF THE BOXES



en garde



SSSS



are those
two
fighting
again?



There are few things that bring me more joy than running across an obscure PSX gem. And although EXPERT isn't without its flaws, I most certainly class it as a hidden gem.

EXPERT is a story-driven FPS that reminded me right away of those post-Wolfenstein 3D FPS games that tried to work within the limitations of the engine to flesh out the gameplay and story through cinematic sequences. And while EXPERT doesn't have the same tile-based movement as Wolf 3D, it still has that feel - and the same scaling sprite enemies that do have a certain charm about them.

It's a Japanese-only release and remains without a fan translation, so I was only able to suss out some of the story focused around an evil syndicate

and the counter-terrorism unit deployed to prevent their evil schemes at the Intelligent Building, a high-tech lab.

One thing that leapt out at me right away when I fired up EXPERT is the soundtrack. It's CD-based music and there are over twenty different tracks. I really like it; it reminds me of Snatcher - as does the cutscene artwork. From what I gather, the game goes for an action movie feel with banter between protagonist and antagonist and plenty of drama. And this again gives the game a unique cinematic quality in the same way Disruptor's live-action cutscenes did.

At the start of each mission, you pick a weapon load out. There's a nice selection of weapons from pistols to uzis to shotguns and all try to remain relatively realistic in design.

EXPERT's levels are all Wolf 3Desque corridor mazes with sporadic open areas and rooms to break up the claustrophobia. Fortunately, you're given a map accessed by a tap of the square button. It's *vital* as it's easy to get lost navigating the corridors. There's usually an objective to achieve such as rescuing hostages or accessing a computer terminal but the end goal is always to reach an elevator to take you to the next floor.

Movement and targeting enemies doesn't feel as fluid as in something like, say, Alien Trilogy but it's not as stiff as I initially feared. But it does add to that uncanny valley of being a dated FPS on a new generation console surrounded by efforts to push the genre forward. There is no crosshair and no auto-aim, so you can sometimes end up just spraying wildly in the direction of fast-moving enemies, especially with the scattergun you pick up part way into the game. It just occurred to me as I type this that in some ways, EXPERT feels like a spiritual successor to Zero Tolerance on Mega Drive.

EXPERT's difficulty level can be punishing as you only get a single life with which to complete a level. Health pickups *are* plentiful, but so are the enemies that hide and ambush you, aided somewhat by the clunkier movement and turning. Fortunately, you're allowed to save the game between levels - an unexpected but welcome feature.

EXPERT is a curious attempt at a cinematic FPS and it's that unintentionally cheesy atmosphere, the music, and the drama that wins me over with it. But be prepared for some frustration if you decide to give a playthrough a go.



GAMING MEMORIES: POLAND'S NES CLONES



Hi all, Kit, Sasha's partner and co-editor of Between the Scanlines, here to share some of my own retro-gaming experiences with you!

As some of you may know, I grew up in Poland and was born in the 2nd half of the 90's – because of my age you may think a lot of the early retro era would have sailed by me, and, well...

You would be right for a fair bit of it, stuff like the Amiga and home computers here in the UK now are things I am only now learning about thanks to Sasha (luff!), but I still have a bit to share thanks to what I would consider somewhat unique circumstances!

The Kit family wasn't the most wealthy, most of the times scraping by, but fortunately for young Kit there was a really thriving market of knock offs over in Poland at the time, usually found at local markets, over in Lublin where I lived located very near the (famous?) castle – kiddos like me would go there with their parents or grans and marvel at the consoles on displays, all the PS1's and PS2's, and at such incredible prices, and what's this, with THOUSANDS of games?!

One such trip, a smol Kit was successful in convincing the Kit grandma to finally buy a PS1 for the price of around 30 zloty (give or take £6), heading home with it in such glee – only to plug it in, lift the flap, and... Um, where's the disc slot, why does this look like a cartridge?



Honestly at the time I didn't really understand these things so well, given I was just a few years of age and still had a wonderful time playing games like Contra, Excite Bike, Balloon Fight and Bomberman, you may have already suspected with this lineup of titles and the rather charitable price that what I ended up with was just a NES knock off, something known to me as a Pegasus! Why I say known to me as, well, as it turns out it was just a knock off of a knock off, one of those 'TV game consoles' that were designed for my exact demographic to take home with thinking they were getting an amazing deal on something else, bah!

It's still a memory I treasure, as it allowed me to have experience with retro games as a child that I can speak of now, and to have an experience with games at all, since our family was too poor to afford a PS1, not to mention anything like a PS2 – and I get to have a genuine nostalgia for a bunch of Nintendo classics, which is great!

In a future story, if there is one, you may learn how it is that a shiny eyed Kit got to experience that dream of a PS1 in the flesh too – but for now, thank you for reading my story!

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COMMUNITY SQUARE

SPOTLIGHT ON VG QA



For this first installment of Community Square, we have a special guest joining us for a Q&A session: **Charlotte Woolley**, aka **CptAlbertWesker** on Twitter/X. Charlotte is someone I've had the pleasure of knowing for a few years now and has recently been promoted to **Lead QA** at **Media Molecule**. And she's someone I had in mind for a feature piece on Quality Assurance, a vital part of game development. So! Let's find out a little about her gaming background and her passion for QA.

Hello! My name's Charlotte Woolley, I'm Lead QA at Media Molecule and have been in QA since 2010, I've worked across all manner of platforms from 7th Generation consoles/handhelds, and absolutely love to identify issues in games that will improve the player experience. I'm also a big 'retro gamer' and spend most of my gaming time playing on anything my CRT will let me, with a particular passion for the PS1. Bonus side point, I have a twin sister who is an award-winning game designer, so I talk in plurals quite often, forgive me!

Playside by Charlotte Woolley

Q1) What's your oldest gaming memory?

I think my oldest memory is on our ZX Spectrum +2, it's that or the Sega Master System 2, my memories blur a bit together. I recall playing games like Survival on the Spectrum and being absolutely astounded that I was a small field mouse and that life was hard, perhaps this is where my love of simulation comes from. On the Master System it was Sonic the Hedgehog, I can never recall which came first though, we had the benefit of our older sister having both the Spectrum and the Master System!

Q2) What do you enjoy most about video games?

There's a couple of different angles that I come from in regard to my enjoyment of video games, first and foremost I love to be drawn into a world, taking part in a story that I can be involved in. So I am pulled towards games with a story, no matter how weak over pure action titles. On the complete other end of the spectrum I love that games allow anything to be possible, even the mundane, I love being able to drive a bus and adhere to the traffic rules, being a mosquito, deep sea diving, something that may not be a traditional notion for a game, and sometimes the slower paced the better! I don't profess to being good at games at all, in fact I'm terrible, but I like repetitive tasks to carry out and the satisfaction in achieving them, which helps with my job.

Q3) What drew you to a career in QA?

This will potentially sound quite negative but I had visions of the film industry that got squashed, I loved editing AMV's and homemade films, editing was a passion! But my sister was studying Games Design, and it was an absolutely massive passion for us both from such a young age! I had no real knowledge of the process of making games, I was convinced I didn't fit the cookie cutter roles of design, art and code which essentially barred my entrance, until I realised that anyone could make a start in Quality Assurance - I'd like to add to this, that time has informed me that anyone can start in QA, but that doesn't mean they'll like it, that it clicks with them, or that they can stand it for 8 hours a day, 40 hours a week! It turned out it clicked for me, I loved it, it was my 'in' to the games industry and I was good at it, because it allowed me to fully encompass some of the enjoyment that I took out of games; repetitive tasks! So I suppose my draw to QA was somewhat accidental.

Q4) Is there something that you've been particularly proud of achieving during your time in QA?

Perhaps not so much a singular thing, but I am particularly proud of the opportunities that I've had, where I've been able to work on series' that I played in my youth. Testing on the Oddworld series, Broken Sword series, even re-makes and re-releases of classics like Pang and Windjammers, I may not be credited in all of them, but getting behind the scenes and raising issues that meant they had a stronger release is amazing! I'm really proud of that, and I'd like to think that my younger self would be so proud to have known that I would eventually work on games in these massive series' that I just have played through so much!



WOBBLY POLYGONS Namco Museum (PS1)



First released in Japan on the 22nd of November 1995, Namco's Museum series of retro compilations were where my love for retro gaming history was born. And though the series would continue to this day, the PS1 iterations of this series are something special and hold a unique feature that I wish would make a comeback.

By the time I picked up volume 1 in late 1996 or early 1997, this original series was already coming to an end with Namco having announced that Volume 5 would be the final one. A sixth 'encore' volume was released late in 1997 but strips back the virtual museum into something more like future entries.

What makes these releases unique to this day is that they not only hold emulated versions of a selection of Namco's 1980s arcade library, but also a polygonal 3D museum for you to walk around and explore!



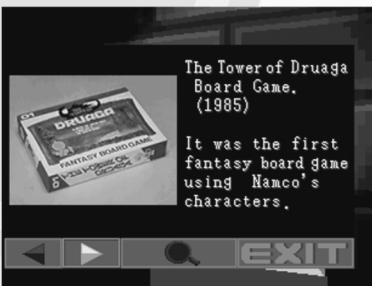
The lobby that greets you in each of the five main Museum games.

Did you know...?

That Namco games sometimes have NAMCOT on the front? You may have wondered why and it was simply the name of Namco's home console ports division. Why they simply added a T to the end of NAMCO, I have no idea!



There's an amazing amount of loving detail and care put into the zones for each of the five or six games on each compilation. The corridors connecting them to the lobby hub are filled with digitized memorabilia from posters and badges to PCBs and merch. Some of it can be a little low-resolution (it must have been rough to read on RF!) but it's the kind of stuff that pre-internet, you only ever saw in uncommon features in mags.



The accuracy of the included arcade games is reportedly very good with Volume 1's version of Pac-Man the best for a number of years. I've also read that Namco re-programmed the games rather than attempting to emulate them. There have been more arcade-accurate versions of these games for yonks now so what draws me back to Namco Museum are the museums themselves - each one a polygonal wonder to behold.

PIXEL GALLERY ++ PIXEL GALLERY ++ PIXEL GALLERY

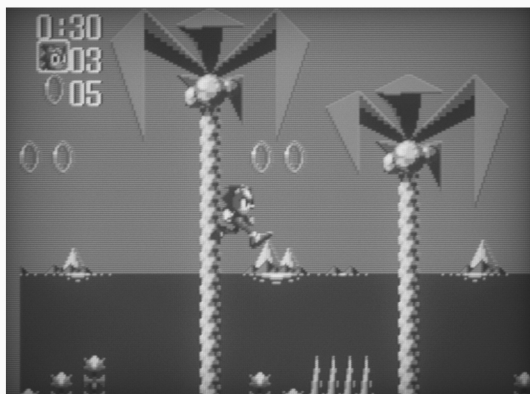
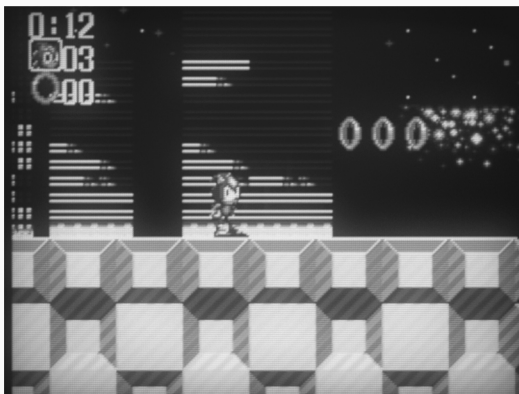


Hi! I'm Leeza, the TRUE star of the PSX game Crime Crackers. And I'm here to share some AWESOME stuff with you, nyaa! First up, we have some community fan artwork!



These pieces of Sonic fanart were drawn by talented artist and Sonic superfan, Timmy the MadFox! You can find them at @MadFox_Timmy on Twitter/X!

Next up, we have some SEGA pixel power! SEGAAA!



Can you believe the screenshots above are from a SEGA MASTER SYSTEM game?! SONIC CHAOS really pushes those 8 bits, nyaa! Try it today and be amazed!



COMMUNITY SQUARE

THE TETRIS MASTER



Another trip to Community Square beckons! The bus pulls up and off gets another special guest: Thom. Thom is someone who I've kicked around with online for a good couple of years now and is well worth following if you're on social media. I invited him to drop by Scanlines Towers for a show-and-tell about their enthusiasm for a certain block-based puzzler and share some of their extensive collection and knowledge. Over to you, Thom!



Hi, my name's Thom, and I'm a retro gamer from the UK. I was always a Nintendo kid first and foremost growing up, but these days I cast my gaming net much wider. I have a particular fondness for puzzle-games, and for the past year have been posting about a different Tetris game or Tetris related product every Sunday on my X/Twitter account - @lillock33.



Tetris 2 + BomBliss - FC

Complex licensing in the '90s meant a lot of the best Tetris games, like this Famicom release by BPS, were exclusive to Japan. Not only does this play a fantastic Tetris, it also introduces the excellent spin-off BomBliss. Forget Tengen Tetris, this is the NES/Famicom version you want!



Tetris Blast - GB

The Western name for BomBliss. Instead of completed lines simply disappearing, any bombs present in them explode. Depending on the number of bombs activated you might only destroy half the line, or you might blow-up half the screen! There's also a "Fight" mode that sees you trying to defeat an enemy character wandering the playfield, kind of like a backwards Tetris Plus.



Tetris - GB

Arguably the most influential and well-known version of Tetris, this is the game that sold millions of Game Boys as the pack-in cartridge! Like with many others, this was my first taste of Tetris when I got my own Game Boy for Christmas '92. The first time I beat B-Type on Level 9, High 5 and saw the space-shuttle-like Soviet Buran take off is a moment I'll never forget.



The New Tetris - N64

This has an absolutely stunning presentation with beautifully rendered, animated backdrops throughout. You can also see the beginnings of what would become the modern Tetris ruleset coming together here, with the hold piece, ghost piece and spin moves all present. My only complaint is the slow speed; it never really reaches a challenging pace.

QUIZ ZONE 2000

Answers to Issue Zero's Questions:

- (1) Name of GTAIIII protag? Claude!
- (2) True or False - Leon Kennedy appears in OG RE? False!
- (3) Names of the first three Cannon Fodder soldiers? Tools, Jops, and Stool!

And For this issue's Quiz Questions...

- 1) What was the first video game to be played in space?
- 2) Guilty Spark is a fictional AI construct in what video game franchise?
- 3) What colour is the shell that strikes the first place racer in Mario Kart?
- 4) What is the name of the ghost in Pacman whose name does not rhyme with the rest?
- 5) What urban infrastructure simulation video game franchise was originally developed by Will Wright?

Answers will be given next issue, good luck!

And thank you for reading <3

